



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource— Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. Our agency has faced many recent job cuts and morale has been adversely affected. Despite my attempts as a supervisor to boost morale, I have not seen much improvement. How can EAS help?

A. Although the morale of your workgroup has not improved, EAS can still be a partner in helping employees recapture a sense of purpose in their jobs and confidence in their future. Some employees suffer more than others from low morale. Making a supervisor referral to EAS when productivity, enthusiasm, confidence, and loyalty to the work unit are problematic can help employees cope with underlying stress and anxiety. In some cases, EAS may help employees clarify their career goals. The ability of EAS to penetrate all levels of the agency makes it an unmatched consultative resource. Your Employee Assistance Professional can also provide insight to management and help the organization determine ways to assist with morale problems and formulate interventions that match the unique culture of the organization. Short, 1-2 hour presentations by EAS may help your team out of a rut and get people looking forward again.

■ Q. I have an employee who periodically comes to work with bruises on her arms, and sometimes her neck. I suspect domestic abuse of some sort, but I don't want to invade her privacy. How can I approach this situation, and better yet, convince her to go to EAS?

A. Your observations about the condition of your employee are a key reason for the increased attention being given nationally to domestic abuse and its effect on workplace productivity. Employers are in a unique position to help, especially when an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available. You can see the bruises so it is appropriate to let her know what you have observed. Saying that you "notice the bruises," and "are concerned that someone may be hurting you," is prudent and appropriate. Do not push her to disclose more personal information about the origin of the bruises, but realize that your statements may elicit such information. Encouraging her to use the EAP is the next step. If there are performance issues that result from the abuse, such as reduced productivity, excessive absences, or impact on coworkers, focus on the performance problems in an empathic and caring manner, and make a supervisor referral to EAS. Do call your EA Specialist about these delicate issues.

■ Q. My employee is very manipulative. My concern is that if I make a supervisor referral to EAS, my employee will put the focus on me, and have the EA professional believing that I am the problem, not her. How can I ensure this does not happen?

A. Make a formal EAS referral by calling your nearest office to let them know why you are referring the employee. Speaking with the EA professional about your concerns is a good idea. This takes very little time, and it goes a long way toward ensuring that your employee will be helped. It also helps prevent manipulation in the interview. It is not unusual for employees to blame their job performance problems on the supervisor, but this typically does not interfere with an EA professional's ability to identify key issues and personal problems of a troubled employee. Sometimes supervisor behaviors do contribute to problems employees face. If these behaviors are realistic concerns, EA professionals provide appropriate guidance or referral to other sources of organizational support without compromising the balanced relationship they maintain between management and the employee workforce.

■ Q. My employee told me he used to be a cocaine addict many years ago, and now only drinks alcohol. I heard that cocaine addicts weren't supposed to drink alcohol, and that doing so is a relapse. Should I refer him to EAS?

A. The treatment of cocaine addicts normally entails education, counseling, and support with the goal of remaining abstinent from all drugs that affect mood, not just cocaine. This includes avoiding the use of alcohol. Use of any mood-altering substance (psychoactive drug) could precipitate relapse to the drug of choice - in this case cocaine. Although you are correct that his use of alcohol is contrary to effective management of addictive disease, your focus must remain on his job performance. It's easy for a caring supervisor to get sidetracked by other concerns when the initial issue may have been job related. Since he has disclosed his drug addiction history to you, it is appropriate to remind him that EAS exists to help him should he begin to experience the adverse effects of his use of substances, no matter what they are. A call to your EA Professional could help you clarify your job concerns and see if a referral is warranted.

■ Q. My employee is impulsive in speech and behavior, makes crude jokes, invades the privacy of others, invites himself to lunch, and is irritating to many people. Is this an EAP issue? In my opinion, he is simply an immature man in his fifties.

A. Your employee's behavior is unacceptable and disruptive to the workplace. It is therefore appropriate to document it, insist that it stop, and make an EAP referral if it does not. The behavior may be immature and impulsive, but it could also be associated with other medical or behavioral health conditions you are unable to diagnose. Hyperactive and impulsive behavior could be related to adult attention deficit disorder, drug use, or other medical problems. It is natural to assume that there are simple explanations for behaviors we find irritating, but this is not always the case. The more upset we become and angrily we react to such behavior, the more we believe the person has the ability to control it. This dynamic is a common one that prevents many people from getting the health care or treatment they need.

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Visit EAS on our website at:
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

